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HISTORICAL SKETCH
OF
THE CENTRAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
OF
ANDERSON, S. C.



BY G. N. C. BOLEMAN
CLERK OF SESSION

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The subject of this sketch is one in which some perchance may be interested, but in presenting it, we are aware that it will be received with a measure of indifference. The young, as a rule, look towards the future, the imagination resplendent with hope, is concerned chiefly with the prospects ahead; matured minds are grappling with the problems of the present, engrossed with its ever absorbing and perplexing cares; and it is only with the advance of age that the mind begins to take backward glances into the dead past, begins to linger there, while memory delights in resurrecting the things that were—the actions and the scenes of years gone by. However, we offer this bit of history with a view to the present and the future as well as to the past. The future depends on the present and the past. All achievement in future time, will depend on what the present is, and on what the past has been. So it is without further apology, that we present to all this brief sketch of the Central Presbyterian Church of Anderson.

It was in the early part of the year 1900, when at the suggestion of the Pastor of the Presbyterian Church here, an effort was started to organize another church. In the spring time or early summer of this year, Mr. Thos. A. Ratliffe and Jas. T. Pearson presented to the writer a petition to this effect, already signed by fifty or more church members. The petition had to it such names as Thos. A. Ratliffe, R. A. Mayfield, D. R. Morrow, R. J. Poole, Dr. J. Louis Gray, J. W. Thompson, Dr. J. C. Harris, J. K. Hood, J. H. Anderson, Jas. T. Pearson, Dr. B. A. Henry, M. M. Mattison and perhaps other names that we fail to recall at this time. We have just mentioned a few of the leading male members, those upon whom the greater responsibility would rest. We scanned the paper and decided at once that with such men as pillars the church foundation was sure. We cast our lot with them and we have never had cause to regret our action.

Just here we deem it a fitting tribute to the memory of Mrs. Rebecca Archer Lewis to record the fact that she was one of the very first women that enlisted for the new church. And it is without any disparagement of the efforts of other good ladies that contributed towards the progress and development of the Church, that we are constrained to make special mention of this good sister, now deceased, whose efforts in the early history were invaluable. From the beginning till the time of her death, she labored for the church. She not only gave liberally of her means, but gave her best service as well, and, as long as she lived, her zeal, her loyalty and her devotion to the church never abated. On the 22nd, day of October 1915, she was called to rest, but her memory abides.

The petition went up to the fall session of the South Carolina Presbytery convened at Smyrna, and our prayer was granted by that body. A commission composed of Revs. J. N. S. Summerell, H. C. Fennell and S. L. Wilson, and Elders W. T. W. Harrison and S. D. Brownlee of the Church of Anderson, and Dr. M. A. Thomson of Varennes Church, were appointed to organize the church, and the time set for Sept. 23, 1900, at three o'clock p. m., and the place the Presbyterian Church, at Anderson. So the new church was then and there organized. The following were chosen as Elders: J. H. Anderson, Dr. B. A. Henry, J. W. Thomson, R. J. Poole and G. N. C. Boleman, the latter being named as Clerk of the new session. Messrs. J. K. Hood, J. T. Pearson, T. A. Ratliffe, M. M. Mattison, D. R. Morrow, J. T. Holleman and Dr. J. C. Harris were elected Deacons, and organized the Deaconate by electing J. K. Hood, Chairman, J. T. Holleman, Treasurer, and T. A. Ratliffe, Secretary. It was on motion of the writer, that the church was named The Central Presbyterian Church of Anderson, and the Chairman of the Board of Deacons immediately secured a charter from the State which is of record in the Clerk's office of Anderson County.

The church was organized then without a home, without any place of worship. The City authorities kindly proffered the use of an auditorium in the City Hall, the same that has since been reconstructed and is used at the present time as police quarters. The first service was held at that place on Sunday, September 30, 1900, and Rev. S. L. Wilson preached the first sermon, and it is a noteworthy fact from that day to this, with the exception of the short vacations of pastors, and during the flu epidemic when churches were closed by the authorities, the church has maintained regular services almost every Sunday.

In that early day the church was poor indeed. One member presented a pulpit Bible, and we are sure this was the first material thing the church ever possessed. Soon after we bought two or three dozen gospel hymns of the cheapest edition. Such was the Church's full equipment at this time.

It was often predicted that this little organization would struggle only for a time and then dwindle and finally die. So it comes to mind that on one occasion, when about the same crowd mentioned above lingered in the hall after services to transact some business, this dire prediction was mentioned, when every man present, then and there, pledged, for better or for worse, loyalty to the church forever.

At this early period, the church was greatly indebted to the good preachers of the A. R. P. Church. They served us on the shortest notice whenever called upon. There were Dr. O. Y. Bonner, Dr. F. Y. Pressley, Dr. D. G. Caldwell, Dr. J. E. Todd, Dr. J. S. Moffatt, Rev. W. C. Ewart and Rev. J. V. Black, some one of whom always came at our beck and call. Most all of these good men have passed to their reward, but their efforts in our behalf are not forgotton. Their memories will live in the minds and hearts of the charter members of this church, and their good work will go on.

And later this church was greatly indebted to Dr. S. R. Preston, President of Chicora College, then located at Greenville. For a compensation of barely expenses, he supplied the church regularly for several months or until a regular pastor was secured. During his time the church made some progress. The membership of the Church increased from about sixty-five to eighty members and a Sunday School was organized that has not failed to function to the present time. Dr. Preston labored faithfully and well. His good work will also live on, and while life lasts, his memory, in the minds of the older members, will never be effaced.

In the latter part of the year 1901, Rev. H. R. Murchison came to us from Edisto, as the first pastor of the church. Mr. Murchison was a strong preacher and served the church faithfully for a period of about four years. During his administration two more Elders were chosen, Mr. D. H. Russell and Mr. R. A. Mayfield, and the church membership increased from eighty to one hundred and thirty-five. It was during his pastorate that a church building was erected. The church bought a lot from Mrs. Kate B. Maxwell for \$1,700.00. However, the price asked by Mrs. Maxwell was \$2,000.00, but she contributed \$300.00 to the church building fund, which amount was deducted from the price of the lot in the execution of the deed. A building committee was appointed consisting of Messrs. J. H. Anderson, M. M. Mattison, G. N. C. Boleman, J. W. Thomson, J. T. Pearson, T. A. Ratliffe and H. C. Townsend. The plan selected was that of Messrs. Wilson & Edwards, Architects, Columbia, S. C., and Messrs. Grandy & Jordan of Greenville were given the contract. When the building was finished, except the Sunday School Annex, which was added later, the church was several thousand dollars in debt. It was then that the burdens lay heavy. Great sacrifices were made by the original members. Tithing incomes is often thought to be liberal, but at this critical period of the church's history we know those of the members

that gave one-tenth of all they possessed. The debt with the necessary running expenses was too heavy, for it seemed that if a vigorous campaign was made and the indebtedness reduced, a corresponding deficit would appear on the expense side, so it was only after several years of struggle, labor and sacrifice that the debt was fully and finally extinguished.

Rev. J. E. James was called to the church as the second pastor. He came to us direct from the Seminary at Richmond in the year 1904, and served the church until 1908. He was a young man, well equipped, and though he may have lacked the discretion of some experienced preachers, yet he was a good preacher and his pastorate, in the main, was successful. During his administration two Elders were added to the Board, Dr. M. A. Thomson and Hon. J. Perry Glenn, and the membership of the church was increased from one hundred and thirty-five to two hundred and five. During this period we also lost by death one of our most faithful members from the eldership. Elder R. J. Poole departed this life November 22, 1908, and in his death, not only the official board, but the church at large sustained a real loss. He was a good man, a man of sterling worth and integrity, a Civil War Veteran, a good soldier in the service of his country, and no less a good soldier of the cross.

In the fall of 1908, Dr. Bunyon McLeod, came to the church from Bennettsville, as its third pastor. His pastorate was a successful one, and continued for about four years until 1912. Dr. McLeod was a hard worker, a good organizer and withal a good preacher. One characteristic of his sermons was brevity, but, nevertheless, they were clear, logical, forceful and eloquent. The membership increased during his labors from two hundred and five to three hundred and thirty.

Elder J. Perry Glenn died Sept. 18, 1911, being the second member of the Board of Elders removed by death. His death was a distinct loss. Mr. Glenn was a man of unquestioned piety, and in point of ability,

he was far above the average. He was also a Veteran of the Civil War and had served one or more terms as State Senator from this County. He was a member of the State Constitutional Convention in 1895. He served his country, his state, and his church well.

Rev. D. W. Dodge was called to the church in 1913, and continued his pastorate till April 11, 1917, when he was deposed by the Piedmont Presbytery while convened in regular session at Walhalla. Mr. Dodge not only entertained views at variance with the church standards, but continued to preach and disseminate doctrines that were not even in accord with the generally accepted creeds of Protestantism; and hence, his arraignment, trial and deposition. This case having been adjudicated by a court of competent jurisdiction, and the whole procedure being a matter of record thereby, we refrain from comment.

During Mr. Dodge's pastorate, Mr. J. L. Sherard and Mr. W. S. Ramsey were added to the Board of Elders.

The vacancy that occurred in the pastorate by reason of Mr. Dodge's deposition continued for a period of several months, and it was during this interval that Dr. D. M. Douglas, President of The Presbyterian College at Clinton, kindly consented to supply the pulpit. He preached for us regularly almost every Sunday until another pastor was secured. Dr. Douglas is so well known that it is unnecessary to comment on his valuable services, which especially at this time, counted for so much for the church. His good work is a part and parcel of its history and is inseparably connected with it for all time.

Elder A. G. Cochran died August 20, 1913, making the third member of the official board lost by death. Mr. Cochran was an elder in the Upper Long Cane Church in Abbeville County. He moved to this City in 1908, and immediately made his connection with this church, and very soon after he was duly elected and installed as an elder here. Mr. Cochran was also

a veteran of the Civil War, a good soldier, a good man, a conscientious officer, ever faithful, loyal and devoted to the church. He was a Christian that would grace the official board of any church.

Again for the fourth time the church lost by death another one of its most faithful elders. On Nov. 9, 1915, Mr. D. H. Russell was called from the church militant to the church triumphant. He was a Confederate veteran also, and in civil life, he had served the public in many responsible positions. He was for many years editor of the Peoples Advocate, a paper published in the City, for a long time Magistrate, for several terms County Superintendent of Education, a member of the Constitutional Convention that framed the State Constitution in 1895, and, in later years, served as City Recorder. Mr. Russell was scholarly, intellectual and aggressive. He was a man of strong convictions and had the courage and ability to stand by them. In his death the church lost one of its strongest supports.

In passing, we might digress to say that it is a noteworthy fact that members of this Church, first and last, have been specially honored politically. Two members of this church had served as members of the State Constitutional Convention prior to their church connection here. In addition, the Church has furnished two Mayors of the City, two City Recorders, one Magistrate, one County Auditor, one County Treasurer, two County Superintendent's of Education, two Members of the House of Representatives, and four State Senators.

In the latter part of 1917, Rev. P. S. McChesney received a unanimous call to the church as its fifth pastor. He came to us from Kingstree. He labors with the church at present and his administration to this time has been successful. He has the church well organized, and he surely has his work well in hand. Mr. McChesney is a good preacher, for without any attempt at the sensational, he delivers only gospel messages, just such preaching, and such only, as will make the world better.

The official boards of the Church as constituted at the present time, are as follows:—Elders; Dr. B. A. Henry, G. N. C. Boleman, J. H. Anderson, J. W. Thomson, R. A. Mayfield, Dr. M. A. Thomson, W. S. Ramsey, and J. L. Sherard: Deacons; John K. Hood, Dr. J. Louis Gray, A. E. Lewis, R. E. Nicholson, T. A. Ratliffe, H. H. Russell, C. Eugene Tribble, J. R. Shelor, T. P. Dickson, M. M. Mattison, J. T. Holleman, T. Frank Watkins and J. T. Pearson.

Thus we have briefly traced the progress of the church from its first inception twenty-two years ago when only a poor struggling, but faithful little band to that of a strong progressive church. It is established now in strength beyond peradventure. It now has a membership, resident and non-resident, of about three hundred and fifty. It owns a plant free from debt, centrally located, as its name implies, which has a money value of probably \$75,000.00. It is now well organized for efficiency, strong materially, but most of all, it is a strong church spiritually.

When on that bright Sunday morning, Sept. 30, 1900, at the City Hall, Rev. S. L. Wilson preached that first sermon, to the newly organized church, there was started an influence that will go down through the ages. Since that distant day a regular supply has been maintained and besides, several evangelical meetings have been held in which the power of the Holy Spirit was evidenced, so we estimate that more than two thousand gospel messages have been delivered from its pulpit. What a tremendous influence! What a fearful responsibility! Multitudes have heard the old, old story told and retold many of whom have passed to the great beyond, but many more are still here, and the effect produced in the lives of men, the good that has been accomplished, the lives that have been made brighter, the souls that have been made happier, the number that have been led to the foot of the cross—will only be revealed at the last day. God grant that it may be a mighty host.

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